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Ministry of Education

COQUITLAM AGREEMENT TO IMPROVE ABORIGINAL RESULTS

COQUITLAM – Port Moody-Westwood MLA Iain Black and Burquitlam MLA Harry Bloy joined Aboriginal leaders and Coquitlam school district officials today to sign the district's first Aboriginal enhancement agreement to help improve Aboriginal student achievement.

"Education is crucial to Aboriginal achievement and preserving Aboriginal culture, and the signing of this agreement illustrates our ongoing commitment to both," said Black.

"This agreement shows the Province, the district and Aboriginal communities are focused and working together to support Aboriginal students so they can achieve their best," said Bloy. "We want Aboriginal student completion rates to improve, and this agreement will help to reach that goal."

There are 1,188 Aboriginal students in the Coquitlam school district this year – 3.7 per cent of the district's total enrolment. The district serves the Kwikwetlem First Nation people and lies within the shared traditional territories of the Tsleil-Waututh, Katzie, Musqueam, Squamish and Sto:lo Nations.

The agreement sets out four goals in the areas of Aboriginal culture, safety, student achievement and completion rates. The goals are to improve Aboriginal student success by:

- Increasing knowledge and respect for Aboriginal culture and history for all students;
- Increasing the number of Aboriginal students who report feeling safe and a sense of belonging;
- Improving Aboriginal student achievement; and
- Improving Aboriginal student grade-to-grade transition rate and school completion rate.

"This agreement serves as a foundation to provide Aboriginal communities with a voice in the education of Aboriginal students," said Education Minister Shirley Bond. "The Province continues to work with school districts and Aboriginal communities to increase Aboriginal student success and create a learning environment where all students feel safe and comfortable, and can flourish."

Working closely with the local Aboriginal communities and the Ministry of Education, the school district developed several strategies to help reach its goals, including:

- Creating Aboriginal student leadership opportunities
- Unveiling and distributing Aboriginal artwork for display in school districts to increase Aboriginal presence.
- Using math and reading resource kits for elementary Aboriginal students
- Having evening tutoring programs available for Aboriginal students
- Increasing work-experience opportunities for Aboriginal students
- Ensuring early assessments for special needs interventions.

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- Developing Aboriginal literacy initiatives and resources such as Journey to Literacy and Aboriginal Big Books.

"I am honoured to sign this document as it solidifies a promise to the Aboriginal people of this area" said Lorraine Richard, Metis, Ojibway / Aboriginal Parent Focus Group Organizer, SD #43. "The agreement is a guide, designed to help all of our children be the best people they can possibly be, academically, spiritually and physically. This is no longer a dream; it is a realization for success for our children."

"We recognize there is not one educational model that fits all and, by providing quality learning opportunities, we can meet our district's diverse student needs," said Melissa Hyndes, Coquitlam school board chair. "As a proud signatory of this Aboriginal enhancement agreement, we are committed to continuing this collaborative journey to ensure success for each and every one of our Aboriginal students."

This is the 32nd Aboriginal enhancement agreement completed in B.C. The agreements support the Province's Pacific Leadership Agenda to build new relationships with First Nations, and to close gaps in health, housing, education and economic opportunities. Aboriginal Enhancement Agreements are one component of the Province's strategy to improve Aboriginal student achievement. Others include the new First Nations education jurisdiction agreement and developing Aboriginal content for K-12 curriculum.

The Province is investing an estimated $51.1 million – $1,014 per student – for Aboriginal education in 2007-08. The funds are used to support Aboriginal language and culture programs, Aboriginal support service programs, and other localized Aboriginal education programs.

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